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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Fred Horvat

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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First off, let me apologize for the delay in getting last week's issue out and into your hands, or on your computers. As I was getting ready to upload it for delivery to our online subscribers, my wireless mouse died. I didn't know what was going on until after I re-booted my system 2-3 times, and still had nada. I replaced the mouse on Saturday, and we're back in business. I was also able to track down my old serial mouse, as back-up!

So, we're back to normal again, or as normal as things are going to be! More rain earlier in the week, causing more problems for everyone - some more destructive than others. We've still been fortunate, and had no water-related problems to deal with at our home.

Happy holidays to all of you celebrating Passover or Easter this week. I tend to not delve into religious stuff, but I wanted to be sure that I sent out appropriate holiday greetings because these are two very important holiday events in their respective religions.

I know that I don't do it often enough, but we here at A-ONE always appreciate it when some of our readers take an interest in what appears in our pages. Some of you send us articles, or point them out to us with a variety of web links. One in particular - Fred Horvat - has been doing this kind of stuff for years. So, even though Fred is usually a week or two behind in his reading of A-ONE, I wanted to mention a huge thank you for all of the stories that he's pointed out to us over the years (and still does!). Thanks, Fred!

The forecast for the next few days is supposed to be wonderful weather; and I'm going to enjoy the next two days off as much as possible. I hope that you're planning to do the same!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone and again there isn't enough in the NewsGroup to put together a good column. And since this weekend is a holiday, this column is going to be short.

It's not just that this is Easter weekend. It's that it's Easter weekend and I'm baking a ham. I love ham. I love ham almost as much as I love turkey. And if you've read any of my columns around Thanksgiving or Christmas, you know how much THAT is. <grin>

I don't remember the specifics of it, but they say that the sense of smell is unique among the senses for some reason. And I can believe that, because I can see a ham baking in the oven, I can hear the sizzle as the heat bakes it, I can even feel it under my hands as I score and clove it. But nothing, and I mean nothing "brings it home" to me like the smell of that pig thigh, cured with wood smoke and salt, spices and sugar.

I can remember being a kid during Easter weekend. The aroma of the ham hanging heavy in the air. The smell of wood smoke, the fruit juices my mother would add to baste it with, the honey and dark brown sugar, the cloves. All of it combining in that warm, heavy, heady aroma for most of the night. You see, in my family, Easter morning is a big deal. My mother's Easter Breakfast is known throughout the town and local municipalities as THE place to go. Okay, okay, so that's a bit of an exaggeration. So what? [grin]

Anyway, in addition to the various Polish foods she always has, there's ALWAYS at least a whole ham. Always has been. And the trick, my mother taught me, is to bake it slowly. Of course, since she started serving food in the morning, the only option was always to start baking the ham the previous night. And that's where these memories of mine come in. I can remember being a kid and laying there in bed, listening to my parents in the kitchen preparing things. My father scoring the ham and studding it with cloves, my mother putting the finishing touches on the rest of the food and making sure everything was as she wanted it.

But it wasn't the sounds. It was the smells. The pineapple juice and cherries, the clove and hardwood smoke, the smell of the ham itself, all conspiring to make my stomach digest itself as I got hungrier and hungrier by the minute.

So I still have fond memories of trying to fall asleep while that heady, thick, luscious aroma wafted through the house in the wee small hours of the night and into the morning. Y'know, it's making my mouth water now just thinking about it.

But, ya know, that's not even the really good part. The really good part is that I had baked a ham a long while ago and, instead of using my mother's "recipe" for the glaze, I made my own. Yeah, I got a little inventive (but not too), and I crossed my fingers as it baked away all night long. I was in heaven. The sweet, smoky thick smell all through the house drove me crazy all night. And when it was finally done... when it was finally out of the oven and cooled enough to carve, I swear that I ate as much as I put on the serving plate... Oh my word it was good! I was very very happy with it.

Of course, I HAD to bring some to my parents, and when my mother tasted it, she paused and rolled her eyes as if she was trying to determine what was in it. Now, she's studied enough of the ways 'competitive cooking' that

she gave no sign of either approval or disapproval. Now, I'm accustomed to this, and it didn't bother me. I knew she'd have something to say one way or the other, when the time was right. She'd always have a constructive suggestion about adding a little bit of this or that, adding a little less of something, etc. So I was prepared for whatever might come.

Of course, she did have something to say, but I wasn't ready for what she said. She waited until there weren't a lot of people around, put another slice of ham or two on her plate and pushed me toward the corner where she delicately whispered, "WHAT is IN that glaze? It.. is... perfect!"

You could have knocked me over with a feather. My mother just did not say things like that... ever. To her, cooking is a matter of making it better and better, always reaching to make it just a little bit more tasty, sometimes a little more healthy, sometimes a little faster to prepare, but always a little bit more tasty. I don't think I'd ever EVER heard her say something was perfect before... or since.

Of course, I told her what was in the glaze, but I'm not going to tell you. [grin]

I still make the same glaze, and I still think back, each time, to the look on my mother's face and the tinge to her voice as she had to ask what that secret ingredient was.

Yes, the sense of smell is a wondrous thing. I can sit here and imagine the sight of a ham, can hear it crackling as it bakes, remember the feel of the cloves in my palm as I stud the ham carefully, but nothing makes my mouth water as I smile like an idiot when I remember that "Easter Sunday Morning Ham" aroma. Yeah, now THAT's magic.

That's about it for this week, folks. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - PS3 Update Kills Linux Support!
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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No Joke! Sony's April 1 PS3 Update Kills Linux Support

Sony Computer Entertainment recently slashed the price of its popular PlayStation 3 gaming console, and now it is slashing a feature from the device: PS3 gamers no longer will have the option to use other operating systems, including Linux, according to Sony.

A new software update to be released this week will eliminate the OS-choice feature. Sony said it had its consumers in mind when it made the decision to disable the feature.

"The decision was made to protect the intellectual property of the content offered on the PS3 system as well as to provide a more secure system for those users who are enjoying games and other entertainment content on the PS3," said Julie Han, a Sony spokesperson.

In the next system-software update (3.21) for the PlayStation 3, the "Install Other OS" feature will be disabled. The feature was available on older PS3 systems. Gamers who own an existing slimmer model of the PS3 will not be affected by the update.

"In addition, disabling the ’Install Other OS’ feature will help ensure that PS3 owners will continue to have access to the broad range of gaming and entertainment content from SCE and its content partners on a more secure system," Han said.

For those users who have utilized the "other OS" feature and plan to run the update, Sony warns that they should first back up any data stored on the hard drive used by the alternate OS. Backing up the data will help users to avoid data loss and will enable them to have access to the stored data after the 3.21 upgrade.

Sony’s move was a formal about-face since Linux was touted as a differentiator at one time, according to Lewis Ward, an IDC analyst. "I can’t imagine more than one percent of PS3 owners actually installed it," he said. "I’ll take them at their word that it was foremost a way to address security loopholes, but I’m equally certain business decisions played some role here, since Linux installation probably led to many customer-service calls and it opened the door to more illicit use of content."

"I don’t think there will be a lot of blow-back on this at the end of the day," he added.

Users, however, blew back and flooded the official PlayStation blog with reaction to the 3.21 update. Hours after the announcement there were more than 1,200 comments to Sony’s post. Poster HippieMan420 said consumers who spent $500 on the console should have the right to use whatever features it came with.

"Preventing hackers is one thing, but taking away a feature that I paid for is another," HippieMan420 wrote. "This is a step backwards in my opinion."

"This is as bad as Apple going into people’s devices and removing content the users paid for," said poster UnholierThanThou. "I personally own a slim, so this doesn’t affect me, but I still believe that those who own compatible systems and choose to run operating systems such as Linux should not be made to use Sony’s proprietary OS. Stick to working on giving us more features."

Several posters wondered whether the April 1 update is Sony's way of pulling an April Fools' Day hoax on its PS3 system owners, mainly because Sony did not first release a 3.20 update. Not taking Sony's update seriously, however, may result in gamers feeling like the fools.

"This is not an April Fools' hoax," Sony's Han insisted when asked about some people's reactions to the news.

PS3 owners who choose not to add the upgrade will risk losing other PS3 features, according to Sony, including access to the PlayStation Network, newer games and Blu-ray movies. Gamers who do not upgrade will also lose playback of copyright-protected videos stored on a media server, the company warned.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Much-Awaited Apple iPad Hits US on Saturday

The Apple iPad launches in the US on Saturday with an apparent deluge of early online orders indicating that the tablet computers will be another big hit for the company.

The iPad "connects users with their apps and content in a far more intimate and fun way than ever before," Apple chief executive Steve Jobs said Monday in a statement.

"We can't wait for users to get their hands and fingers on it this weekend."

Apple promised that its latest creation will be available in the company's retail shops and at Best Buy consumer electronics chain stores beginning at 9:00 in the morning in respective US time zones.

People who ordered iPad devices early should receive them on Saturday as well.

Demand for iPads has evidently blasted past Apple expectations and as of Monday notations at the online Apple Store alerted buyers that new orders would not be shipped until April 12 or "late April" depending on models.

"It does have the appearance that Apple has another pretty big hit on its hands," Altimeter Group partner Michael Gartenberg told AFP on Monday.

"It never hurts initially to have demand outstrip supply by a little bit. As a general rule, people want what they can't have."

Apple likely wants to make certain that there are iPads on store shelves for people that show up on Saturday wanting to get their hands on a

device that Jobs said must be held to be truly appreciated. Related article: Groundbreaking products by Apple

Apple has not released details of how many iPads will be available for the Saturday launch but some estimates put the figure as high as a several hundred thousand.

"My guess is that the numbers are going to be pretty impressive," Gartenberg said of the iPad sales debut.

"This is significant considering these are people who haven’t seen or touched an iPad and are simply going on Apple’s word."

Jobs unveiled the iPad in San Francisco on January 27, billing it as a "revolutionary" device that will carve out a home between smartphones and laptop computers. Facts: The new Apple iPad

The iPad allows users to watch video, listen to music, play games, surf the Web or read electronic books.

The iPad also runs most of the 150,000 applications made for the iPod music player and the iPhone. Apple has promised that the device would come with "12 new innovative apps designed especially for iPad."

While Apple is making a powerful debut in the tablet computer market "everyone and their brother" will be fielding competing devices by the end of this year, according to analyst Rob Enderle of Enderle Group in Silicon Valley.

A major Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas early this year was rife with companies showing off new tablet computers. The iPad poses an immediate threat to Amazon.com’s popular Kindle electronic readers.

"It isn’t certain Apple will dominate the tablet market," Enderle said. "The key part will be content. If Apple doesn’t get the content deals, the iPad stays with Apple fans."

Newspapers and magazines are eagerly tailoring interactive, digital editions in a hope that the iPad heralds a new way to deliver content and bring in revenue.

The iPad model featuring Wi-Fi wireless connectivity will be available in Apple’s US stores from April 3 and the model that offers both Wi-Fi and 3G cellular connectivity in late April, Apple said.

The company said both the Wi-Fi and 3G models will be available in Australia, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain and Switzerland in late April and in additional countries later this year.

Apple will start with modest numbers of iPads and use feedback to solve problems revealed by real-world uses, according to Enderle.

"Basically, you are paying to be their beta test," Enderle said of those rushing to be among the first with an iPad. "There will be breakage. They will work it out, drop the price, and then ship in volume."

Based on past Apple tactics, the company is likely to cut iPad prices three months or so after its debut, the analyst predicted.

Apple Acquires ’iPad’ Trademark from Fujitsu

Apple has secured the rights to the iPad patent from Fujitsu, according to a report.

Patent Authority dug up the transfer statement, which was dated March 17.

Terms of the deal, if there was one, were not disclosed.

Fujitsu had previously developed its own iPad, a candybar-shaped device, in 2002.

The Fujitsu version of the iPad is a point-of-sale device, running the PXA 270 processor with Microsoft Windows CE .NET 5.0, together with a 802.11 b/g radio and Bluetooth v1.2, according to Fujitsu. Resellers like Current Directions still advertise the product.

Apple’s timing of the trademark deal left little room, from a scheduling perspective; Apple is scheduled to begin allowing consumers to pick up preordered iPads this weekend, although Apple itself has sold out its available preordered iPad supply. The tablets will also be sold at Best Buy.

FBI Warns Letters to Governors Could Stir Violence

The FBI is warning police across the country that an anti-government group’s call to remove governors from office could provoke violence. The group called the Guardians of the free Republics wants to "restore America" by peacefully dismantling parts of the government, according to its Web site. It sent letters to governors demanding they leave office or be removed.

Investigators do not see threats of violence in the group’s message, but fear the broad call for removal of top state officials could lead others to act out violently. At least two states beefed up security in response.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty said he received one of the letters but wasn’t overly alarmed.

"We get all kinds of, shall we say, ’interesting’ mail, so it’s not out of the norm," Pawlenty said Friday. "It got more attention because it went to so many governors."

As of Wednesday, more than 30 governors had received letters saying if they don’t leave office within three days they will be removed, according to an internal intelligence note by the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security. The note was obtained by The Associated Press.

The FBI expects all 50 governors will eventually receive such letters.

Governors whose offices reported getting the letters included Jennifer Granholm of Michigan, Bobby Jindal of Louisiana, Chet Culver of Iowa, Dave Heineman of Nebraska, Jim Gibbons of Nevada, Brad Henry of Oklahoma, Mike Rounds of South Dakota, Bob McDonnell of Virginia, and Gary Herbert of Utah, where officials stepped up security in response to the letter.

In Nevada, screening machines for visitors and packages were added to the main entrance to the state Capitol as a precaution.

"We're not really overly concerned, but at the same time we don't want to sit back and do nothing and regret it," Deputy Chief of Staff Lynn Hettrick said.

Granholm spokeswoman Liz Boyd said federal authorities had alerted the governor that such a letter might be coming, and it arrived Monday. Boyd, who described the letter as "non-threatening," said it was opened by a staffer and immediately turned over to the Michigan State Police.

Jindal's office confirmed that the governor had received one of the letters and directed questions to the Louisiana State Police.

"They called us as they do for any letter that's out of the norm," said Lt. Doug Cain, a state police spokesman. He declined to provide specifics about the letter, but said, "not knowing the group and the information contained in the letter warranted state police to review it."

The FBI warning comes at a time of heightened attention to far-right extremist groups after the arrest of nine Christian militia members last weekend accused of plotting violence.

In explaining the letters sent to the governors, the intelligence note says officials have no specific knowledge of plans to use violence, but they caution police to be aware in case other individuals interpret the letters "as a justification for violence or other criminal actions."

The FBI associated the letter with "sovereign citizens," most of whom believe they are free from all duties of a U.S. citizen, like paying taxes or needing a government license to drive. A small number of these people are armed and resort to violence, according to the intelligence report.

Last weekend, the FBI conducted raids on suspected members of a Christian militia in the Midwest that was allegedly planning to kill police officers. In the past year, federal agents have seen an increase in "chatter" from an array of domestic extremist groups, which can include radical self-styled militias, white separatists or extreme civil libertarians and sovereign citizens.

2nd American Woman Charged in 'Jihad Jane' Case

Federal prosecutors filed terrorism charges Friday against a pregnant American woman in the so-called Jihad Jane case. The two American women are accused of plotting online to attend a terror training camp.

Jamie Paulin-Ramirez flew from Ireland Friday to Philadelphia, where she was arrested by agents with the joint terrorism task force there. Her 6-year-old son flew with her and was placed in the custody of child protective service workers.

A U.S. official told The Associated Press that Paulin-Ramirez is pregnant. The official was not authorized to discuss that detail and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Paulin-Ramirez made a brief initial appearance in federal court Friday, and a detention hearing was scheduled for next week. Her lawyer could not immediately be reached for comment.

Last month, authorities in Ireland detained Paulin-Ramirez, originally from Colorado, and six others as they investigated an alleged plot to kill a Swedish cartoonist whose drawing had offended many Muslims.

Those seven suspects in Ireland were linked to Colleen LaRose, a 46-year-old woman who had traveled to Europe but was arrested last fall when she returned to the United States.

The new indictment charges that LaRose and Paulin-Ramirez, 31, separately traveled to Europe to support violent jihad, or Muslim holy war. The court papers also say that once LaRose was in Europe, she invited Paulin-Ramirez to join her to attend a "training camp."

Paulin-Ramirez, prosecutors charge, accepted the invitation and asked to bring her 6-year-old son with her. She and the boy traveled to Europe last September and on the day of her arrival, she married a co-conspirator whom she knew only from online discussions, authorities said.

Last August, the Paulin-Ramirez and LaRose allegedly had a computer conversation in which LaRose said "when our brothers defend our faith (and) their homes, they are terrorists ... fine, then I am a terrorist and proud to be this."

According to the indictment, Paulin-Ramirez replied, "that’s right... if that’s how they call it then so be it I am what I am."

When the initial charges were unsealed last month against LaRose, it marked one of only a handful of times the U.S. has filed terrorism charges against a woman.

Prosecutors alleged that LaRose called herself "Jihad Jane" in Internet conversations, but she denied that when questioned by the FBI. She has pleaded not guilty in the case.

LaRose apparently spent long hours online in recent years while caring for her boyfriend’s elderly father in a small eastern Pennsylvania town. The congressman who represents the district said she had cooperated with authorities after her arrest last fall, which went unannounced until the seven suspects in Ireland were detained in March.

Paulin-Ramirez’s mother, Christine Mott, said she had heard that her daughter returned to the U.S. Friday.

"She’s in some serious, serious trouble," Mott said tearfully in a phone call from her home in Leadville, Colo.

Mott said she didn’t know if her daughter was pregnant. She said she was concerned about her grandson.

"This has been twice that that little boy has been with his mother when she was arrested, in two different countries," Mott said. "I need somebody to help me bring that little boy back here to some sanity. That little boy didn’t ask for any of this."

Mott said she was also worried about her daughter.

"My daughter’s not a monster," Mott said. "These people came into my home through the Internet and they seduced a very lonely, lonely person. If that can happen to me, it can happen to anybody."

US Concerned by Australian Internet Filter Plan

The United States has raised concerns with Australia about the impact of a proposed Internet filter that would place restrictions on Web content, an official said Monday.

The concerns of Australia’s most important security ally further undermine plans that would make Australia one of the strictest Internet regulators among the world’s democracies.

"Our main message of course is that we remain committed to advancing the free flow of information which we view as vital to economic prosperity and preserving open societies globally," a U.S. State Department spokesman Michael Tran told The Associated Press by telephone from Washington.

Tran declined to say when or at what level the U.S. State Department raised its concerns with Australia and declined to detail those concerns.

"We don’t discuss the details of specific diplomatic exchanges, but I can say that in the context of that ongoing relationship, we have raised our concerns on this matter with Australian officials," he added.

Internet giants Google and Yahoo have condemned the proposal as a heavy-handed measure that could restrict access to legal information.

The plan needs the support of Parliament to become law later this year.

Australian Communications Minister Stephen Conroy says the filter would block access to sites that include child pornography, sexual violence and detailed instructions in crime or drug use. The list of banned sites could be constantly updated based on public complaints. If adopted into law, the screening system would make Australia one of the strictest Internet regulators among the world’s democracies.

Conroy declined to comment on the U.S. concerns.

"The Australian and U.S. governments liaise regularly on a broad range of issues. It would be inappropriate to discuss the details of these consultations," said his spokeswoman, Suzie Brady.

Some critics of Australia’s filter have said it puts the nation in the same censorship league as China.

Hackers Hit China Foreign Correspondents Club Website

China’s foreign journalists association said Friday it had taken its website offline after it was targeted in repeated denial-of-service attacks.

The Foreign Correspondents' Club of China (FCCC) said it did not know who was behind the attacks but that they originated from Internet addresses in both China and the United States.

However, it noted the "physical location of the servers does not tell us much since hackers can use any machine they have been able to exploit."

The statement said the club, regarded by the Chinese government as an illegal organisation, "has been the target of persistent denial-of-service attacks."

"We have taken the site down temporarily while we work to sort out the problem," it said.

A denial-of-service attack floods a network with so many requests that normal traffic is slowed down or completely interrupted.

The move comes after Google re-routed traffic from its Chinese-language search engine to an uncensored site in Hong Kong over state web censorship and cyberattacks on Gmail accounts it said originated in China.

There also have been mounting allegations overseas, including by the US government, that China is ramping up its global cyber-espionage activities and has become a key source of world cyber-attacks - a claim denied by Beijing.

The FCCC said on Wednesday that the Yahoo! email accounts of foreign journalists based in China and Taiwan had been targeted in hacking attacks.

"In one instance, a Beijing-based journalist?s account had an unknown forwarding address added, sending all the journalist?s messages to an unknown recipient," it said in a notice to members, adding that it had confirmed eight cases.

Google: Online Attacks Aimed at Vietnam's Critics

Google Inc. accused Vietnam on Wednesday of stifling political dissent with cyberattacks, the latest complaint by the Internet giant against a communist regime following a public dispute with China over online censorship.

Like China, Vietnam tightly controls the flow of information and has said it reserves the right to take "appropriate action" against Web sites it deems harmful to national security.

The cyberattacks targeted "potentially tens of thousands," a posting on Google's online security blog said.

It said it was drawing attention to the Vietnam attacks because they underscored the need for the international community "to take cybersecurity seriously to help keep free opinion flowing."

Google apparently stumbled onto a scheme targeting Vietnamese-speaking Internet users around the world while investigating the surveillance of e-mail accounts belonging to Chinese human rights activists, one analyst suggested.

The attackers appear to have targeted specific Web sites and duped users into downloading malware programs, said Nart Villeneuve from The Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto. That may have allowed the infiltration and surveillance of activists, he said.

"This kind of stuff happens all the time in China," said Villeneuve. "It has a chilling effect. It silences people."

Google engineer Neel Mehta wrote in the posting, "these attacks have tried to squelch opposition to bauxite mining efforts in Vietnam, an important and emotionally charged issue in the country."

The mining project involving a subsidiary of Chinese state-run aluminum company Chinalco is planned for Vietnam's Central Highlands and has attracted strong opposition.

Foes fear the mine would cause major environmental problems and lead to Chinese workers flooding into the strategically sensitive region.

The computer security firm McAfee, which has investigated the malware, also discussed the attacks in a blog posting Tuesday.

"We believe that the perpetrators may have political motivations and may have some allegiance to the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam," wrote George Kurtz, McAfee's chief technology officer.

Vietnamese officials did not respond to requests for comment Wednesday.

Last fall, the government detained several bloggers who criticized the bauxite mine, and in December, a Web site called bauxitevietnam.info, which had drawn millions of visitors opposed to the mine, was hacked.

The malware apparently began circulating at about that time, according the McAfee blog. It said someone hacked into a Web site run by the California-based Vietnamese Professionals Society and replaced a keyboard program that can be downloaded from that site with a malicious program.

Google says its dispute with China was triggered by a hacking attack that emanated from the mainland and attempts to snoop on dissidents' e-mail.

Last week, Google shut down its search operations in China, Vietnam's northern neighbor, after complaints of cyberattacks and censorship there. Google now redirects search queries from China's mainland to the freer Chinese territory of Hong Kong.

On Tuesday, many users of the Chinese Google search engine experienced difficulties. Analysts suggested the troubles may be linked to the company's decision to move to Hong Kong.

Google initially said it was an in-house technical problem but later shifted its explanation, blaming the "Great Firewall" - the nickname for the network of filters that keep mainland China's Web surfers from accessing material the government deems sensitive.

The sudden disruption and lack of explanation fit with how the government has brought companies to heel previously in the heavily monitored Chinese Internet industry, analysts said.

"I don’t think anyone should be surprised," said Bill Bishop, a Beijing Internet entrepreneur and author of the technology blog Digicha. Tuesday’s problems were payback by the government, he said, because "Google humiliated China."

Don’t Be Fooled by ’Facebook Antivirus’

F-Secure has spotted a new kind of rogue anti-virus spreading on Facebook.

Using a variety of names including Facebook Antivirus, Antivirus in Focebook and F’acebook antivirus. (Note the misspellings. According to F-Secure, Facebook is working on blocking the scams now.

The link to the application comes in a spammed message from a friend. It asks for access to your profile, and the chain continues.

Malicious PDF File Doesn’t Need a Software Vulnerability

A security researcher has found a way to run arbitrary code on Windows computers by embedding it in a malicious PDF file.

The code will run when viewed in two popular PDF reader applications, but the author of the hack says it doesn’t exploit a software vulnerability.

PDF readers from Adobe Systems and Foxit don’t allow embedded executables to run directly, wrote Didier Stevens on his security blog. But Stevens found a way to get an embedded executable to run via a different launch command.

Upon opening the rigged document, Adobe Reader will display a warning message saying that launching code could harm the computer, so a user would need to approve launching an application. But Stevens found he was able to change part of the message, which could be modified to persuade the user to open the executable.

In his example, Reader will launch a harmless calculator program, but that could be replaced with malicious software. Stevens’ proof-of-concept code worked using Adobe Reader 9.3.1 on Windows XP SP3 and on Windows 7.

Foxit’s PDF reader does not display a warning, but as the proof-of-concept code was originally written, the executable would not run, likely "due to some variation in the PDF language supported," Stevens wrote.

By Wednesday, Stevens had fixed that problem, which allows an executable to be launched in Foxit merely by opening the manipulated PDF.

Stevens has notified the two software companies.

"I’ve reported it to Foxit Software, and they told me they will issue a fix this week. I don’t know what the fix will be, but I assume it will be a warning message, to be in line with the other PDF readers," Stevens

said via e-mail.

Stevens hasn’t released the proof-of-concept code, but it is possible that someone could figure it out.

However, "it’s not easy. To give you an idea without getting too technical: it takes me 5 different steps to execute arbitrary code. The test PDF file I published on my blog contains just the first step," Stevens said.

Adobe could not be immediately reached for comment.

Utah Jury Decides Unix Battle in Favor of Novell

Novell Inc. never sold ownership rights to Unix computer software code when it allowed another company to take over the servicing of the venerable server operating system used by large corporations, a jury in Utah decided Tuesday.

The verdict was a setback for The SCO Group of Lindon, Utah, which hoped a victory would help lift it out of bankruptcy and strengthen a separate case alleging IBM Corp. misappropriated Unix code for improvements that made the open-source Linux operating system run better.

Some former Novell executives testified that they intended to sell the copyrights along with the Unix operating system, and SCO Group offered an amendment written a year after the 1995 sale that it said transferred the rights.

"Obviously, we’re disappointed in the jury’s decision," said SCO trial lawyer Stuart H. Singer. "We were confident in the case, but there’s some important claims remaining to be decided by a judge."

SCO will ask U.S. District Judge Ted Stewart to award the copyrights to SCO "even if we didn’t have them before," he said. "It’s a setback, but it’s not over."

SCO filed a slander-of-title lawsuit in 2004 asserting Waltham, Mass.-based Novell hurt its business and reputation by claiming it sold serving rights, but not copyrights. SCO was seeking damages of up to $215 million.

"Novell is very pleased with the jury’s decision confirming Novell’s ownership of the Unix copyrights, which SCO had asserted to own in its attack on Linux," the company said in a statement. "Novell remains committed to promoting Linux, including by defending Linux on the intellectual property front."

Novell bought Unix from AT&T Corp. in 1992, and SCO has said its predecessor, Santa Cruz Operations Inc., paid Novell 6.1 million shares of SCO stock valued at more than $100 million for the Unix rights in 1995.

Yet Novell wanted to keep ownership to collect royalties from legacy Unix licenses, and SCO has been making those royalty payments, Novell trial lawyer Mike Jacobs said.

In return, SCO got Unix source code and the right to license improved

versions, he said.

"It’s an important win for the open-source community because SCO had argued there was protected Unix in Linux and had sought substantial licensing fees from Linux users based on that claim," Jacobs said.

IBM has embraced open-source Linux but denied SCO’s allegation that it dumped proprietary Unix code into the freely distributed operating system.

Tuesday’s verdict "demonstrates the failure of SCO’s litigation strategy," IBM spokeswoman Karen Lilla said. "IBM remains confident in the merits of its position."

The verdict came after a three-week federal trial in Salt Lake City.

PC Maker, Inspiration for Microsoft Dies in Georgia

Dr. Henry Edward Roberts, a developer of an early personal computer that inspired Bill Gates to found Microsoft, died Thursday in Georgia. He was 68.

Roberts, whose build-it-yourself kit concentrated thousands of dollars worth of computer capability in an affordable package, inspired Bill Gates and his childhood friend Paul Allen to come up with Microsoft in 1975 after they saw an article about the MITS Altair 8800 in Popular Electronics.

Roberts, an ex-military man, later went on to careers as a farmer and a physician, but continued to keep up with computer advances: He recently told Gates he hoped to work with new, nanotechnology-enhanced machines, according to son David Roberts.

"He did think it was pretty neat, some of the stuff they’re doing with the processors," said David Roberts, who confirmed Gates rushed to Georgia Friday to be with his mentor.

Roberts died in a Macon hospital after a long bout with pneumonia, according to his family.

"Ed was willing to take a chance on us - two young guys interested in computers long before they were commonplace - and we have always been grateful to him," Gates and Allen said in a joint statement released Thursday. "The day our first untested software worked on his Altair was the start of a lot of great things. We will always have many fond memories of working with Ed."

The man often credited with kickstarting the modern computer era never intended to lead a revolution.

Born in Miami in 1941, Roberts spent time in the U.S. Air Force and earned an electrical engineering degree from Oklahoma State University in 1968, according to information provided by his family.

He later parlayed his interest in technology into a business making calculators; when large firms like Texas Instruments began cornering the business, Roberts soon found himself in debt, David Roberts said.

Meanwhile, he was gaining an interest in computers - at the time, hulking machines available almost exclusively at universities.

"He came up with the idea that you could have one of these computers on your own," said David Roberts, adding his father expected to sell a few units. "Basically, he did it to try to get out of debt. "

Roberts himself would later describe the effort as an "almost megalomaniac kind of scheme" that he pursued out of youthful ambition.

"But at that time you know we just lacked the, eh, the benefits of age and experience," Roberts said on a program called "Triumph of the Nerds" that aired on PBS in 1996. "We didn't know we couldn't do it."

His son described his father as a tinkerer who surveyed his friends before building his personal computer.

"My assumption was that there were a bunch of nuts out there like me that would like to have a computer," Roberts told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, in a 1997 interview. "To engineers and electronics people, it's the ultimate gadget."

The Altair was nothing like the ultra slim laptops of today: Operated by switches and with no display screen, it looked like little more than a metal box covered in blinking, red lights.

"In the early days it was pretty useless. People just bought it thinking that it would be neat to build a computer," Gates said in a video history interview with the Smithsonian Institution.

Roberts founded Micro Instrumentation and Telemetry Systems, which sold the kits. A young Gates and Allen would later found their fledgling Microsoft firm in Albuquerque, N.M., where MITS was based, and provide a computer language that helped hobbyists program and operate the Altair.

The men would eventually feud after Gates and Allen began selling versions of BASIC - or Beginners All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code - created for Altair to competitors, according to the 2003 book, "Leaders of the Information Age."

David Roberts said the men had since overcome their differences, and his father had remained an influence in both their lives.

He sold his company in 1977 and retired to a life of vegetable farming in rural Georgia before going to medical school and getting a medical degree from Mercer University, in 1986.

Roberts worked as an internist, seeing as many as 30 patients a day, his son said. But he never lost his interest in modern technology, even asking about Apple's highly anticipated iPad from his sick bed.

"He was interested to see one," said Roberts, who called his father "a true renaissance man."

A funeral is planned Monday, in Cochran.

Web Gets April Fools' Makeover of Goofy Hoaxes

The Internet got an April Fools' Day makeover, as many of the major destinations on the Web continued the annual tradition of lighthearted hoaxes.

The prank Web sites were rolled out Thursday in a collective effort to amuse, not confuse. In a way, it's the Internet's biggest holiday.

YouTube offered the curious option of watching videos in text - essentially a stream of code instead of images.

The comedy video site FunnyOrDie.com was revamped as Bieber or Die, its home page riddled with the teenybopper star Justin Bieber. Last April Fools' Day, the site was "bought" by country star Reba McEntire.

Bieber was in the joke: In a video, he claimed he purchased the site and now "anything that's not Bieber dies." He also spoofs a number of famous viral videos, including "Dramatic Bieber" and "Bieber After the Dentist."

Google renamed itself Topeka, an ironic one-upmanship with the Kansas city, which renamed itself "Google, Kan." in March to help lure the company's experimental fiber-optic network.

Google is one of the most energetic April Fools' Day celebrators; last year it claimed to have invented a new technology to "index your brain." Pranks were rolled out across its myriad services, including a "vowel outage" on Gmail and a version of Google Translate for animals.

The site for Ben & Jerry's offered an even more enticing fantasy: virtual ice-cream. Starbucks poked fun at itself by unveiling new "micra" and "plenta" sizes, one absurdly small, the other as big as a bucket.

A number of sites took advantage of the recent explosion of 3-D by launching their products in another dimension. Google Maps and Google Books both unveiled 3-D versions, as did the video site Hulu.com. It added a 3-D viewing option that, when clicked, led to a mock Hulu "orientation" video.

Some news organizations, which on April 1 often have to fend off fake news, embraced the day's mockery, too. British media have stuck to the tradition for years.

One highlight: The London newspaper the Daily Telegraph reported that ferrets were the key to delivering broadband to rural areas.

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